Treason should not be Dignified by Concessions from Patriots.

SPEECH

OF

HON. DANIEL E. SOMES,

OF MAINE.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, U. S., February 16, 1861.

The House, having under consideration the report from the select committee of thirty-three—

Mr. SOMES said:

Mr. SPEAKER: I do not propose, in the brief space of time I shall occupy, to fatigue the House with a recital of the present difficulties which seem to threaten the peace and stability of the nation. They are already too familiar to every American citizen; and are but the result of an attempt to override the laws of civilization, by endeavoring to force slavery upon enlightened communities where the institution never before existed.

The advocates of slavery have tried to harmonize the most intensified despotism on earth with free schools and Christianity. They have insulted the intelligence of the North by declaring that wrong is right, and that all who differ from them in this conclusion should be gagged. They have undertaken to unite two repellant bodies, and because they would not fuse, now threaten to break the crucible. Any political chemist could have foretold the result.

When the fathers framed the Government, they were compelled to tolerate slavery, from the necessity of the case; but, at the same time, they adopted the theory of equality among men, and provided in the Constitution the means that were sure to lead to its ultimate triumph, namely, free speech and a free press. They did not fear error so long as truth was left free to combat it. Our Southern friends understand the power of truth when uttered without restraint, as well as the first Napoleon did, and they fear it more, because the despotism of Napoleon's sway was a democracy compared with the tyranny of American slavery. The nephew is wiser than his uncle, or the slaveholder; for he means, hereafter, that the golden and not the iron rule shall govern his people; and he is, therefore, beginning to loosen the muzzle, and unfetter the press. He prefers intelligence to ignorance, intellectual strength to brute force, wealth to poverty, national greatness to an imbecile oligarchy, a personal renown, which shall keep up with or run before the progress of civilization, rather than present ease and the execrations of future generations. Time will verify this statement.

The slave power might learn many a lesson of political wisdom by crossing the Atlantic; but it chooses the Gulf. In order to coerce the North into compromising its principles, the South has inaugurated a system of terrorism

that has no parallel in the history of the world; and when it is understood that there is no sincerity in the present movement, at least with four-fifths of the inhabitants of the Southern States, but that it is a mere game of brag, it certainly seems surprising that so many of our statesmen should be drawn into the snare.

But I may be told, as a proof of their sincerity, that already several of the States have held conventions, and resolved themselves out of the Union, and have formed a new Confederacy. But conventions are cheap, and resolutions still cheaper; besides, conventions and resolutions constitute no inconsiderable part of Southern political capital. The Southern States occasionally hold conventions, and resolve to open direct trade with foreign nations, by means of lines of magnificent steamships and fast clippers. They resolve great cities where small towns have hardly held their own for many years. But I believe the world has wagged along about the same after as they did before the resolutions passed; and fast clippers and the stupendous steamships float only in the imaginations of the resolvers.

But you say they have gone beyond resolutions in this case; they have seized the forts and arsenals, and have threatened to coerce the Government into a war. I know they have, and that is the very card that was required to bring Congress on its knees, and they knew it. I like the boldness with which they play their game; they "stake their all" on a small pair, and then, without moving a muscle of the face, they look their opponent in the eye, until he quails and lays down his hand.

I was in Washington most of the time for six weeks prior to the assembling of Congress, and had good reasons for believing that a deep and broad scheme was laid, which has since been partially carried out, to dissolve the Republican party, and obtain new concessions and pledges from the free States, by threatening to dissolve the Union, without the slightest desire or intention to do so. I had a peep behind the scenes, and can assure the timid ones that it is nothing but sheet-iron thunder that so startles and alarms them. The managers did not fully comprehend the firmness of the Northern people, and have, therefore, been obliged to play their game more desperately than was at first intended.

If that which was intended as a farce should end as a real tragedy among the actors, the getters-up of the play will be responsible for the results. If the true Union men will stand aloof from taking any part in this performance, the secessionists will, in the course of ninety days, cry for quarter, instead of concessions.

But, suppose we grant that the Union is now really in danger, what will save it? Or, if it cannot be saved, what is the next best thing to be done? The seceding States repudiate all offers of adjustment; it is therefore folly to waste time or words on them; it is worse than folly, it is weakness and cowardice.

In a speech before the late State Convention in Alabama, Mr. Yancey said:

"Mr. President, I avow myself as utterly, 'unalterably opposed to any and all plans of 'reconstructing a Union with the Black Re- 'publican States of the North. No new guar- 'anties, no amendments of the Constitution, 'no peaceful resolutions, no repeal of offensive 'laws, can offer to me any, the least, induce- 'ment to reconstruct our relations with the 'non-slaveholding States. This opinion is not 'founded on any objection to a confederation 'with the States north of Mason and Dixon's 'line, on principles mutually agreeable to them; 'but it is founded on the conviction that the 'disease which preys on the vitals of the Fed- 'eral Union does not emanate from any defect 'in the Federal Constitution, but from a deeper 'source—the hearts, heads, and consciences of 'the Northern people."

But we are told that the border States must be saved, and that this can only be done by giving them some compromise upon which they may stand, and around which they can rally to resist the tide of secession.

It is proposed by gentlemen to build a platform out of empty compromises and meaningless promises for Union men of the border States to stand upon, and with this to cheat the people back to their constitutional allegiance. We may cheat ourselves thus, but not the people. Any compromise now offered can only have the effect of demoralizing and disorganizing the only power upon which the tranquillity of the country depends, namely, the Republican party; for these same disturbing elements will reappear whenever the slave power has any real or fancied grievance, unless all attempts at compromise are sternly resisted by the Republican party; for all other parties are broken up, and have no political strength. The Republican party must save the Government by standing

firm upon its platform of principles, or lose itself in the general chaos. There are various propositions of compromise offered by different classes of men. The first class of compromisers are called conservative. They are the representatives of property, either in slaves at the South or merchandise at the North; they have everything to lose and little to gain in any political or social disturbance, and are, therefore, ever ready to counsel the sacrifice of principle whenever there is an appearance of agitation. The second class are men of passive or negative qualities, with no particular purpose, and are the subjects and tools of the positive men. Then there is a third class of men, who, having an eye to an office or a contract, suddenly become overwhelmed with patriotic emotions, and are ready to save the Union at all hazards.

There is still another class of men that should not be overlooked, for they have, indirectly, a good deal of influence. They are what are called retired gentlemen, or millionaires; they have their money permanently invested, and have retired to their easy chairs to doze out the balance of their days, and are unwilling to be disturbed. They were once like other men, active and brisk and bold in their operations; but now those days are but dreams of the past; they have now a taste for everything that is old, mouldy, and stationary. The world whirls too fast for them; it makes them dizzy, and so they are anxious to stop it. If you could be permitted to look into their safes, you would find large packages of Government and State stocks, as well as railroad and manufacturing. You would also find bonds and mortgages and bank stock in abundance. They are in the habit of overhauling and contemplating these, as a poet does Shakspeare or Longfellow. In a word, these men are chronic fogies run to seed, and should be treated with consideration and respect, for we have one of them at the head of the Government. But there is a class of men who do not propose to give any further license to slavery; who act from higher motives; whose controlling influence is humanity; whose ambition is its growth and universal development. This class has secured the control of the Government in the triumph of the Republican party, after a struggle of many years.

There are certain strata in political history that mark the progress of the race with as much certainty as do those of geology the formation of the earth. These are war, money, and humanity. The first had its day, and controlled nations with an iron will. Then war yielded to money, and capital has been for many years the barometer of public opinion, and the controlling influence of political parties and nations.

But this is about to give up its sceptre to humanity, giving a higher tone to public sentiment; a better political practice, as well as theory, to the country. War and money are to be used only as auxiliary agents in the development of this new power. This young giant is already inaugurated in the North; and you might as well attempt to resist the laws that govern the seasons as to check his onward course. The position of the free States is uncompromising hostility to the expansion of slavery.

In view of these facts, let us see what is the real condition and interest of the slave States, and the policy which they should pursue. The cotton States—South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, Arkansas, and a part of Texas—are slave-consuming States; Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Missouri, are slave-breeding States. The former seek extension of breeding territory to secure cheap negroes; the latter, if they would extend slavery at all, should strive to annex more consuming territory, for the purpose of enhancing the market value of slaves. What, then, is the policy of the two sections of the South? I cheerfully admit that the border States are but slightly responsible for the disturbed state of affairs, and that the crime rests mainly upon seceding or slave-consuming States.

Suppose, then, the consuming States really mean secession and an independent Southern Confederacy: will the border slave States go with them, and assist in opening the African slave trade, when it is evident that, sooner or later, the value of slaves would be so reduced by fresh importations, that it would become unprofitable to raise them?

In addition to this sacrifice of the interests of the breeding States, they will, from their geographical position, be compelled to fight the battles of the consuming States as well as their own, and to assist in suppressing servile insurrection as soon as the restraints of the Federal Government are removed from those in the North who would excite it. New and increased facilities will be offered for the escape of this

property; for property with brains and legs would then be less reliable than stocks, or even Indian bonds; and I wish to tell Southern gentlemen now, that if they succeed in breaking up this Union, and place themselves upon unfriendly relations with the free States, they can never recover from Northern soil a single slave who steals himself; for then, even *marshals* and *commissioners*, being shorn of their fees, will join the hosts of freedom. The policy of the consuming States will be free trade and direct taxation, which must necessarily prevent the development of the natural resources of the border States and reduce them to slave breeding alone.

Such is the condition and position of the seceding slave-consuming States, with whom it is proposed the border States shall ally themselves, unless we of the free States concede some compromise upon which they can stand.

Why should they, then, demand of the North concessions that will only result ultimately to their disadvantage and our disgrace? Suppose that we give you New Mexico, with a stringent slave code: what then? I have already shown you that it would only create competition with your own slave-breeding States; and that, while you expand slave territory, you contract your own income.

Suppose we offer you, as a compromise, the strongest guaranty that we will not interfere with slavery in the States; you have it already in the Constitution. And one year ago you rung the changes on the Constitution and the Union, until the phrase became a byword. Has the Constitution changed; or why have you lost faith in it? The Republican party is satisfied with it as it is. Shall we repeal the personal liberty bills? You now say you care nothing about them. Do you want more guaranties for the rendition of fugitives from labor? Can you get any better guaranties by going out of the Union than you now have in it?

The fugitive slave law was framed to satisfy the slave power, and was made so heavy that it crushed its Northern champion—the greatest man of the age—and carried down a President and the Whig party. Are you not satisfied with such a feat, or have you got your eyes on another crop of great men and a successful party whose necks you wish to place under this modern guillotine, called compromise? Several are already on their backs, looking up at the glistening blade; but they are unwilling to die alone, so they beckon us on to share their inglorious fate.

It is urged by some that we should yield all the territory south of 36° 30′ to slavery, on the ground that slavery cannot exist there and be profitable; that the laws of nature forbid it. Why should not slave breeding be as profitable in New Mexico as in Virginia or Maryland? It is for breeding alone that they want this territory, as I have endeavored to show; but, if it is worthless, why are you so tenacious to secure it for slavery?

You say it is a mere abstraction for which we are contending, because slavery cannot possibly go there. And yet you regard this abstraction of so much importance to you that you say you are willing to dissolve the Union and plunge the country into civil war to secure it. If it is an abstraction with us, of course it must be an abstraction with you.

But you say you have gone so far in the secession scheme that it would be humiliating to be compelled to retract; and therefore we must do something, if it is only a semblance of concession. I admire the coolness of this proposition more than the justice of it. You who are for disunion have turned traitors to the Government—stolen the forts and arsenals—and now you come to us and insist that we must get up a sham and a cheat in order that you may escape the gallows without tarnishing your honor or humiliating your pride.

It is true the North has been condescending and generous towards the South, and I have no doubt will continue to be, so long as the Union shall last. It is natural for intelligent and honest communities to be more generous than just, especially toward the weak and erring; but when criminals come to such a people and demand that their crimes shall be endorsed, instead of being pardoned, I think it is rather more than they will consent to. And although a few members of Congress, representing a generous people, may be induced to stand god-fathers to traitors, and become accessories to treason, after the fact, I feel confident that their constituents will hang them higher on the tree of public scorn than Haman or Judas hung.

Let me say to gentlemen of the border slave States, if you would be protected by the Federal Government against insurrections; if you would have slavery still tolerated and your firesides respected; if you would escape the torch

and the assassin's knife; I beseech you in all candor and frankness, accept the aid and co-operation of your best friends; ally yourselves with the North, and let the cotton States fight their own battles. Acknowledge the rightfulness of the doctrine of freedom, education, and elevation which now obtains in all the free States; disenchant yourselves of the influence of that which, in your hearts, you would gladly be rid of, and the North will assist you. Gentlemen may scout the idea of emancipation, but it is soon to come. God and humanity have decreed it. Empty compromises cannot prevent it. If the slaveholders are honest in declaring that they are afraid that the people of the North will interfere with slavery, and destroy it altogether, and that these fears are founded upon the increasing anti-slavery sentiment and political strength of the North, would it not be well for them to treat this Northern power with consideration, and would it not be wise to conciliate it?

I know that gentlemen have reason to laugh at this when they look upon the past history of Northern political parties; but I can assure you that a new order of things has taken possession of the Northern mind, and I desire to state to gentlemen on both sides of the House that the North has awakened to the practical consideration of these issues, and if the Southern States persist in keeping up the present warfare against the rights of citizens who are compelled from business relations to travel South on peaceful missions; if they insist that the North shall regard the Constitution in letter and spirit as a sacred instrument, and yet they themselves treat it as though it were but so much blank parchment; if they mob and hang men and women who are guilty of nothing but having been born in the free States; if they continue to rob the Government to aid them in carrying out their treasonable designs, they will soon find the whole people of the North becoming abolitionized and consolidated in one great and powerful party. I say this not in a spirit of menace; but I desire to state the truth. They have borne and forborne until "forbearance ceases to be a virtue." They have been constantly yielding to the demands of the slave power for the sake of peace, until neither peace nor justice are to be found. And I now warn the South, that unless it retracts at once from its treasonable operations and commences a system of conciliation toward the North, it may make up its mind that slavery in the States will date its downfall from the day the first act of treason was committed, and in a few years it will go out in blood. I warn you not to take the flimsy compromises which some few gentlemen on this side of the House would offer you. They do not represent the sentiment of the North; the North will repudiate any compromise, such as has been proposed, and the party that makes it. Let us look this question squarely in the face, and grapple with it as it is. Let us not attempt to deceive ourselves or cheat others. In a crisis like this, we should be men, do our duty, and take the consequences.

Would you compromise with a burglar who had entered your house, by giving him the key of your safe when you had the means to put him out? What would you think of an officer who should make return on his warrant that he found the thief whom he was ordered to arrest, but that said thief had declared himself as having seceded from the laws, and that he should regard an arrest as coercion on the part of the officer?

The border States are between two fires; what can they do to extricate themselves from this dilemma? I repeat, conciliate the free States; first, by consenting to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the dock-yards, and arsenals, on a basis which shall be just to the slaveholder; and, second, to a system of gradual emancipation in the border States, and allowing your people, within your own borders, the right which the Constitution guaranties them, to discuss the subject of slavery.

Consent to this, and the North will aid you in any reasonable endeavor to protect yourselves and your property, and the whole civilized world will applaud you in so humane an undertaking. I will not advise as to the particular mode of emancipation. Free discussion among yourselves will lead to a peaceable and equitable solution of the whole subject. All the natural advantages of your fertile and beautiful country will at once begin to develop themselves. Your abundant water-power will be brought into requisition. Manufacturing cities will suddenly spring up, opening home markets for the products of your soil under the invigorating and inspiring influence of free labor, which will increase your wealth and importance a thousand fold. You may thus

save that which you now have, or its full value, and gain that which, while slavery exists as the controlling influence of your social and political system, you can never receive. I need not recount in detail the happy effects of the inauguration of such a system in the border States; they are witnessed every day in the growth, wealth, enterprise, peace, prosperity, and happiness of every free State in the country. You have the alternative before you, to adopt this plan or do worse. Compromising may stave it off for a brief period; and it may not. If it does, it will be like building a dam across a river, raising the water to the top only to fall with all the more noise and force, devastating the country, when your compromise dam shall break away.

Secession, compromise, and reconstruction is now the platform of the odds and ends of the late Democratic party. Secession to force compromise, compromise to disrupt and destroy the Republican party, and the reconstruction of the old Democratic party on its ruins. This is a new platform, but is fully in keeping with all its platforms in the past. The Democratic party was always bold, positive, and radical; its opponents have been conservative and timid. The Democratic party has been the engineer, fearlessly letting on the steam, while its opponents have been at the brake, ready to stop the train at the slightest jostle.

In a new country like ours, where almost everything is yet undeveloped, and where the masses are more or less impulsive and speculative, the bold and courageous are bound to succeed, while the timid will complainingly follow after them. It is an instinct in the human race to admire boldness and daring. Men will sooner follow a hero into the ditch, than a coward into the camp. Hence the people have always rallied around the standard of the Democratic party, and have borne it on to victory time and again, although that party has been too often in the wrong. It was only when the more selfish and unscrupulous attempted to perpetuate and extend a wrong, by unlawful and unconstitutional means, that a division of the party was caused, and consequently a loss of power. It has had the shrewdness to keep its opponents always on the defensive. While I would commend the political sagacity and pluck of that party, I would save this young champion of freedom and true Democracy—the Republican party—from internal dissensions and dissolution.

I would save the honor of the free States from a disgrace so humiliating as would be involved in the cowardly surrender of the great principles for which they have so valiantly contended and honorably won. And before this scheme of bartering away a nation's hope to appease the wrath of a few traitors is consummated, I would implore gentlemen whose talents and position necessarily give them great influence in the nation to reflect upon the awful responsibility which rests upon them. If you "sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind." You may imagine you are sowing the seeds of promised peace and future hope; but they will spring up thorns of disappointment and civil discord. Other men have gained position and the affections of the people by their brilliant talents and their eloquent and luring words of patriotism, and their devotion to the great principles of humanity; and when they had scaled all the barriers that lay between obscurity and the temple of fame, this same devil, the slave power, that is now whispering in your ears, stealthily crept up behind, and promised them the highest national honors if they would fall down and worship at his shrine. They listened, they consented, and fell; and, as they tumbled from their giddy heights, the whole land shook as with an earthquake, and humanity cried aloud. Young men, you who have a brilliant future before you, I beseech you to ponder and pray before you take the first fatal step. A nation's fate is in your hands; the friends of liberty are waiting to catch your decision; downtrodden humanity, that has clanked its chains for centuries, and fed its soul on the sands of the desert, is now turning its agonizing look to the throne of Heaven, and with its fettered hands uplifted, and its heart throbbing now with hope and now with fear, admonishes you of the importance of this decision. If you vote for compromise, you sow, on soil now free, the seeds of whips, chains, theft, robbery, and murder. You vote to legalize the forcible separation of families, and the selling of them on the auction block, to be driven to the rice and cotton fields, there to be worn out in a few years like things. You vote to compromise with a power that regards neither compromise, law, nor the Constitution. You vote for the perpetuity of ignorance, and you vote for the overthrow of the freedom of speech

and of the press. You lose the respect of the friends of freedom; you gain the contempt of the slave power and the applause of hell. You say to all traitors, go on with your robbery and treason; hereafter they shall be respectable and at a premium. Whenever you are beaten at the ballot-box, you have only to steal the public property and declare war against the Government, and we will make concessions, even to the sacrifice of our dearest principles, and break the power that defeated you, if you will be quiet and remain in the Union.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably my last appeal on this floor. I should be willing to do anything that might lead to the restoration of national tranquillity and social harmony which would not compromise the honor and dignity of the nation; but I fail to discover, in any proposition now before the House, anything that will lead to these results. And before I would leave a word or a vote on record that might be construed into favoring the extension or perpetuity of slavery, I would perish on the steps of my country's Capitol, or be lost in the general wreck that would follow revolution. If I thought the preservation of the Union would be the means of furnishing fetters for those who are yet to be born on soil now free, I would be the first to break the chain that has so long bound us together, and let the slave States swing out from the protection of the National Government, to contend alone against servile insurrection, famine, and civil war. But, sir, I trust and believe that no such calamity will befall the hopeful and prosperous millions of the American States; and when this crisis shall have passed away, and the dark horizon shall be lighted up with the rainbow of hope, peace, new glories, and a happy future, the people will decide who were right—those who would strike hands with wrong, or those who would subdue it, and let universal liberty "have free course and be glorified." Let us have liberty and Union, if we can; but liberty without Union rather than Union without liberty. The country will occasionally receive the assaults of traitors, and the shocks of political earthquakes. Popular outbreaks will disturb the harmony of society, and whirlwinds will plow through party organizations as they do through the forests of our vast domain, breaking down the old, decayed trees, and testing the strength of the young and vigorous. But, when the storms shall have cleared away, we shall find, instead of destroying the temple of civil liberty, they will have proved how strong is its framework, and how broad and firmly laid is its foundation, and that these disturbing elements were as necessary for the purification of parties and society, and as essential for the healthful growth of our new system, as the agitation of the atmosphere is for the health and life of man.

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